

“We Cannot Not Do This!”

After hearing a lecture by Dr. Esselstyn, Leslie Haas and Richard Crofton-Sleigh knew they had to make a change.

by J. Lanning Smith

“We cannot not do this,” said current NHA member Leslie Haas to her partner, Richard Crofton-Sleigh, after watching a YouTube video of Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn speaking to the city of Medina, Ohio in late 2012. Although neither Leslie nor Richard had heart disease, they both recognized the powerful message that Dr. Esselstyn was conveying on the importance of a low-fat, whole food, plant-based way of eating.

Dr. Esselstyn’s message hit Leslie especially hard since she had recently experienced the death of her former husband from a stroke. He had been, from all outward signs, an athletic, healthy man in the prime of life. But as Leslie speaks of it now, she says, “He was healthy on the outside but unhealthy on the inside.”

Immediately upon watching the YouTube video of Dr. Esselstyn, both Richard and Leslie talked to her sister, Karen Heitman and husband George, who now live less than a mile away from them in Sun City Hilton Head. They implored them to watch the video as well. After watching it, the decision was made by all four to go “cold turkey” and donate every bit of food that did not comply with their new way of eating.

It wasn’t long after that that they formed the “Eat Smart, Live Longer” Club, with Karen as president and Leslie as vice-president. Leslie remained V.P. until July 2016 when she took over the club as president. After that, she remained on the board of directors for the club and has been a board member ever since.

In 2017, Leslie joined the National Health Association (NHA) after meeting Mark Huberman and Wanda Fowler-Huberman when they came to Hilton Head to vacation. That encounter occurred as a result of Mark and Wanda eating lunch at Pure Natural Market on Hilton Head Island. Owner Tracy Owens, a friend of Leslie’s and many others eating whole food, plant-based in the local area, introduced Mark and Wanda to the three sisters who

founded the Eat Smart Live Longer Club.

That began a longstanding relationship between the NHA and ESLL. Leslie has been instrumental within ESLL and within the local community in promoting NHA to others. And six years after watching that initial video of Dr. Esselstyn to the City of Medina, Leslie and Richard are continuing to enjoy the whole food, plant-based lifestyle.

On a Mission

But it’s not just personal with Leslie. She is on a mission, and she’s fervent about it. She wants to save lives and improve health, and she does so by talking to everyone she meets about how healthy it is to eat a whole food, plant-based diet. It doesn’t matter if it’s the cable television guy when he comes to fix their television reception or if it’s somebody she happens to see in the grocery store. Leslie won’t hesitate to tell anyone about what a great discovery it was when she and Richard learned about the whole food, plant-based way of eating.

Early on in ESLL, as the membership was growing, everyone was learning together how to live this new lifestyle. In her desire to educate and motivate people, Leslie saw that there was a need for all of them to help each other out with how to eat this new way. That led to starting what came to be known as How-2s sessions once a month that allowed club members to get together outside of other meetings

and social events to learn more about how to eat a WFPB diet. These sessions continued for several years as club members learned from each other the intricacies of this way of eating.

From “Food for Life” to “Healthy Eating with Leslie”

Recognizing that cooking whole plant-based foods is a skill people needed to learn, and after meeting Dr. Neal Barnard, founder of the Physicians Committee



In red, Leslie and her partner Richard pictured with Dr. and Mrs. T. Colin Campbell on a recent cruise.

for Responsible Medicine, Leslie decided to apply to Food for Life to be a PCRM cooking instructor. She was quickly accepted into the program and traveled to Washington, DC to study to become a PCRM instructor. Once certified, she began teaching classes in Sun City, including classes focused on foods for weight loss, cancer prevention and survival, diabetes management and prevention, and heart disease prevention and management.

More recently, Leslie has expanded the number of people who can learn from her by going on Sun City TV with her own cooking show, titled *Healthy Eating with Leslie*. By doing so, she is no longer speaking to just 25 students at a time. Instead, she is able to reach many of Sun City's 14,000-plus residents daily and on YouTube. This television program has been an extension of Leslie's mission to educate and motivate.


Cruising to a Better Lifestyle

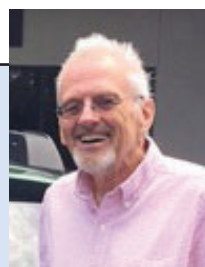
It's not all work and no play for Leslie, however. For the last five years, she has been on the Holistic Holiday at Sea Cruise, also known as the Vegan Cruise, out of Miami, Florida each spring. She enjoys this up to 11-day conference, featuring gourmet whole, plant-based foods, visits to Caribbean islands and countries, onboard entertainment, and numerous lectures by leaders in the WFPB movement.

Unfortunately, because of his schedule as a pilot for sporting events around the country, her partner Richard has only been able to join her on one of these cruises to date. True to her calling, Leslie has taken advantage of his absence to volunteer and assist the program staff with various duties, including introducing speakers during the cruise. Her introductions have become so popular that

cruise organizers now have Leslie introduce all the big-name speakers during the cruise.

Leslie enjoys cruising and she is hoping that she and Richard will be able to get the time off in October for NHA's river cruise in Germany. To Leslie, that will be the best of both worlds, combining her love of travel with a boat full of WFPB cruisers. She is looking forward to the sights and the gourmet plant-based meals being offered by that cruise.

Leslie has also been actively promoting the NHA cruise to ESLL members. As a result of her promotions, there are several women in ESLL who are looking at the cruise as a girls' fun vacation. For Leslie, it's all part of her mission, a mission that derived from watching one talk given by Dr. Esselstyn to the city of Medina. It all goes back to that decision and the statement, "We cannot not do this." Leslie will tell anyone she meets, "You cannot *not* do this." 



J. Lanning Smith (Jim) is past president and current board member of the Eat Smart Live Longer Club in Sun City Hilton Head. He lost 150 pounds and got off of all prescription medications through following a whole food, plant-based lifestyle. He is a graduate of the eCornell T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies and the Rouxbe Forks Over Knives Plant-Based Online Cooking School. You can visit Jim's blogs at FinallyOurTime.com and TheArtofPlant-BasedMealCreation.com, and read his column in his community newspaper, *The Bluffton Sun*.

Joan Ransier Testimony

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LDL 73, HDL 47, fasting glucose 85, and A1c 5.1. I'm on no meds. In addition, David is off his blood pressure meds and has lost weight too (as an added bonus, he is off his CPAP machine and has stopped snoring). TrueNorth was life changing for us both.

For the first time in my life, I am confident the excess weight is never coming back. I don't think much about my IBS anymore, and I don't live in fear. I have a new relationship with food that makes me smile, because it's all very clear to me.

Last year I became a member of



Joan and her husband, David, with their grandkids, Keller, Finley, and Carlie (left to right), and their dog Lady; taken December 2017

the NHA and am excited about all the health-promoting educational resources available through this remarkable association. Exploring the website, it is clear there is a wealth of benefits to membership.

I am so grateful to Nikki, Melanie, Dr. Raisanen and TrueNorth, my work for ensuring I could be gone for three weeks, and David for his unwavering support on our journey of growing old together in good health. One of the first things Dr. Raisanen said to me at TrueNorth was, "You are going to lose a lot of weight and feel great from this point forward." I didn't realize how very prophetic that statement was. 